

# The History of Union Baptist Association

1969 - 1992

(Monroe, NC 28110)

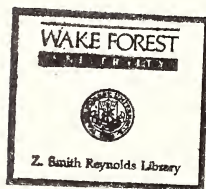
By Dr. Walter Woodson, Jr.  
Wingate College  
Professor of Communications

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# **The History of Union Baptist Association**

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It is significant to note that part of the missionary's salary came from the North Carolina Baptist State Convention. This assistance continued until 1980.

It didn't take long for the search committee to find a new man to fill the position of missionary. Rev. Aaron Tyner came on board before the next annual meeting. Tyner graduated from Wingate College, Furman University and Golden Gate Theological Seminary. He had served as associational missionary in the Holly Hill section of South Carolina.

To help Tyner as he moved in, the association executive committee approved money to paint the missionary's home and to purchase a stove.

Tyner held the missionary's position through September, 1973. Under his leadership, the association made three important changes:

- (1) Began a chaplaincy ministry in the local hospital. Rev. J. F. Cunningham was employed at \$100.00 per month and his salary was paid by the state convention.
- (2) Endorsed a grant of \$2,500.00 to Trinity Church toward purchase of property on which to construct a building. This move can be considered the first of a series which has continued even until the present day.
- (3) Established a committee of three pastors and three laymen to offer advice when internal church problems arise and to offer outside help if requested. This committee had no authority but could counsel.

During Tyner's tenure, three churches came into the association: Oakland, Clearview, Lakeside or Trinity. Clearview does not exist today.

One item of business which came to the executive committee in 1972 set the pace for future changes. At the 12/12/72 meeting, Rev. C. H. Arrowood proposed that "the moderator, vice-moderator, trustees and missionary form a committee to investigate the possibility of separating the missionary home and the associational office and report back."

This motion developed further at the 3/13/73 meeting. The executive committee approved a recommendation to open a savings account to plan toward an associational office. Those first two proposals lay dormant until 1977 when the move toward an associational office moved forward at rapid pace. Rev. Tyner resigned in 1973 and moved to South Carolina. He died in Decem-

ber, 1991 after an extended illness.

Rev. Joe Larrimore, pastor of First Baptist of Monroe, served as moderator from 1973 until 1974. In an interview, he said the association developed a spirit of harmony during those years." A Baptist association has clear purposes," he noted. "It helps strengthen the local church by providing training; it assists by offering special programs; and, above all, it provides a channel for churches and ministers to have Christian fellowship."

By 1973, growth was coming to Union Association. The following figures indicate this:

Number of churches: 60

Number of baptisms: 615

Number of members: 17,081

Gifts to local missions and local expense: \$1,646,589.00

Gifts to world missions: \$204,832.00

In the brief time when the association had no associational missionary, the work continued to move forward. The executive committee received an application from Hartis Grove Baptist on 12/13/73 asking assistance of \$2,500.00 from the state convention.

The most significant move of the executive committee at that December meeting was the recommendation to hire Ellis Marks.

### *REV. ELLIS MARKS, February 12, 1974 - February 28, 1986*

Marks became the first "Director of Missions", a new title which more appropriately describes his job.

Ellis Marks graduated from Wingate College and Southeastern Seminary. He had been a pastor 25 years with some of that time spent in Union Association.

Marks, in an interview, recalled his call to associational missions. "Rev. Leonard Horne submitted my name to the search committee and they contacted me." He made it clear the decision came with difficulty. "My call had been to pastoral ministry, but I wanted to be open to the Lord's will. I left the decision to the leadership of the Holy Spirit."

Marks said the committee wanted a Director of Missions who would

emphasize training. "The committee said our churches need to strengthen what they already have." Marks recalled the consensus was the association already had an adequate number of churches.

Myrtle Marks, the wife of Marks, worked by his side throughout his years of leadership. She recalls that their work was both "interesting and rewarding." She contributed greatly to the association as a whole, as well as being a devoted wife.

One major problem facing Marks as he began his tenure was lack of money. "The association was broke in 1973. A special meeting of ministers and concerned laymen was called". Each church present at the meeting pledged to contribute. This meeting may well be considered the launching of a modern program for Union Association.

Marks moved quickly to take charge. He urged the association to establish a World Missions Conference in May, 1976. Rev. Bill Culbertson, pastor of Marshville Baptist, directed the conference along with his duties as moderator (1975 - 76). 34 churches participated.

Culbertson also recommended the association look into the possibility of acquiring land for an associational office. In an interview, he recalled how enthusiastically the churches approved that idea. "The purchase of land and building an office came to pass quickly," he said. Culbertson added that he kept an excellent relationship with Marks during all the years Marks served as director.

Purchase of land and building an associational office has been a major achievement for Union Baptists. The following items in list order suggest how this developed:

1. 12/09/75- Executive committee purchased C. D. s at \$2,000.00, \$3,000.00, \$5,000.00. Four year plan at 7 per cent interest
2. 10/25/76 - Association purchased 1 and 1/3 acre lot on Tomberlin Avenue near Lee Park Church for \$5,300.00. Added cost of legal work.
3. 12/ -/76 - Do all necessary to investigate and evaluate land purchase and report back with recommendation concerning development of future office space
4. 10/23/77 - Special meeting of association called to receive more bids on building. Motion made by Lex Funderburk, chairman of building committee.

5. 12/06/77 - Additional \$1980 needed for extension of sewer lines on lot purchased from Rev. C. W. Teague.
6. 10/23/77 - Special called meeting. Moderator John Wood said meeting was to deal with plan for proposed building. Lex Funderburk stated the bid of \$103,446.76 came from Melvin Mullis, contractor.  
Loan of \$100 thousand can be obtained from American Bank and Trust for 9 3/4 per cent interest for five years.  
Joe Larrimore moved committee be authorized to borrow up to \$110 thousand. Vote: 70 for; 14 against.
7. 10/30/79- Annual meeting. Approved purchase of furnishing for new building at cost of \$6500. The associational W.M.U. purchased the furniture for the Director of Missions office, and an overhead projector for the association. Lee Raeford gave the kitchen cabinets. Mrs. Ollie Howell made all the drapes and sheers for the associational building free of charge. There were many other gifts too numerous to mention.
8. 03/11/80 - \$8,000.00 had been received in building project.
9. 06/03/80 - Total of \$12,000 received to date.
10. 10/30/84 - Note burning service on Tuesday night to burn note of indebtedness on associational building.

Rev. John Wood became moderator and served during the 1976-77 years. Wood had been an active supporter of associational work for some time. He served on a variety of committees including a van committee. He led the pastor's conference one year.

In an interview, he said he supported building the associational office. In his view, that construction has been a good investment. "Much of the credit needs to go to Lex Funderburk who headed up the planning and the building. Lex's strong influence led the way in making the building possible," Wood said.

Wood holds strong views regarding the need for associational work. "An association helps coordinate the work of the churches. It provides information on matters regarding state and SBC causes. Also, I need other Christians and they need me."

Wood thinks there must be more to this spirit of community than gain-

ing statistics. "We can sacrifice fellowship and cooperation, but the end result will not be as meaningful."

B.C. Beale followed Wood as moderator in the 1979-80 years. Beale possessed a gracious spirit which drew people to him. He loyally supported his denomination and Union Association.

Just as he had good relationships with the other moderators, Marks recalled that he and Beale maintained a splendid relationship. Beale's term of office marks the close of a 10-year period of growth. Note the statistics:

Number of churches: 64 (and 2 under watchcare)

Number of baptisms: 466

Total membership: 19,925

Local gifts and expenses: \$4,797,815

World mission gifts: \$452,956

Associational missions: 59,661

The completion of the associational building marks a high point in associational business. Also in 1980, the association received no financial assistance from the state convention for the salary of Director of Missions.

By 1980, the need for a secretary in the associational office emerged. The issue was discussed at the June executive committee meeting and a questionnaire was sent out to churches regarding this matter. Based on those results, the executive committee decided there was no need at that time. Many volunteers worked in the office to help Marks with the tasks that had to be done, including the newsletter.

However, on March 7, 1981, a request came for a secretary who could work 25 hours per week. By June of 82, a committee was named to hire a secretary. This special committee also drew up a job description.

Mildred Tucker began work on September 7 of the same year. She maintained regular office hours, produced the newsletter, served as associational clerk, worked as the receptionist, as well as performing other duties. The strength of her work is apparent when anyone looks through copies of the annual meetings. Her accurate and balanced detail have been a primary source in preparing this update of the history. She served the association for seven and one-half years, resigning on June 8, 1990, but continues to serve as clerk. Debra Clonty served from May of 1990 until February of 1991. She was followed by Mary Earley who is still serving as secretary.

During the 12-year term of Marks, he thinks fellowship among Baptist ministers was outstanding. This view is reinforced by comments from those who served as moderator during the Marks years. Marks said any Baptist association has four functions:

1. Fellowship-To strengthen each local church and develop relationships between churches.
2. Training-To help a church develop strong leadership
3. Cooperation- To work together is better than to work alone especially in mission causes
4. World Mission Program-To provide information so churches can carry out Jesus' Great Commission

During the Marks years, seven churches came into existence: Covenant, Cornerstone, Emmanuel, Hillcrest, Fellowship, Forest Hills, and Lakeview.

Marks retired on February 28, 1986. He said the years serving Union Association were good years: twelve years of building for the future. He gives gratitude to God for the privilege of serving in this challenging work. He also believes the association will continue to grow. "If it stays within the bounds of what an association is supposed to be, it will grow."

Ellis and Myrtle Marks were honored with a retirement reception on February 23, 1986 sponsored by the Pastors and Wives of Union Baptist Association.

During the time when there was no Director of Missions, one matter came to the attention of the association and consumed a great amount of time. That issue was baptism.

The issue of baptism first came to the association on October 22, 1985. Rev. George Gouge, moderator, called a special meeting. He explained the reason for this special meeting being "for the purpose of investigating the methods of two of our churches on the way they receive members."

(In the following description, this writer has closely followed information in 1986 ANNUAL: PARTNERS IN MISSIONS: UNION BAPTIST ASSOCIATION; pages 30-32; pages 47-53.)

Rev. John Grant brought a recommendation regarding the matter from the executive council: The Christian Relations Committee serve as a commit-

tee to investigate this matter. Gouge explained the committee would be composed of members to be voted on at the annual meeting. He then read the names of nominees.

One amendment was added. " The investigation to be with the primary reason of reconciliation."

At the December 10, 1985 meeting, this special committee reported to the executive committee. Lawrence Funderburk, chairman, gave a progress report. He asked for special prayer on behalf of the committee.

A further motion then emerged that the Relations Committee bring a definite recommendation by February, 1986. An amendment changed the date to March. Then came a motion to table the amendment. The tie vote was 27 to 27. The original motion was withdrawn. A further motion asked that the Relations Committee bring a recommendation at the regular executive meeting in March, 1986.

The meeting on March 11, 1986 reported 75 members from 44 churches in attendance. Lawrence Funderburk brought a recommendation. He asked the Pastors' Conference meet with the two churches (First Baptist of Monroe and Wingate Baptist) and report back by May 15. After considerable discussion, Gouge reminded the body all it could do was make a recommendation to the association at the annual meeting.

Another motion recommended the two churches be put under watchcare. That matter also had to be dealt with at an annual meeting.

One further motion was made to withdraw fellowship from the two churches. This motion was ruled out of order. Thus the matter came to the annual meeting.

At the afternoon session of the annual meeting ,October 28,1986, Rev. Albert Hinson, chairman of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, offered the following amendment to Article Four of the Association Constitution and Bylaws: "...and will accept for membership Christians that have professed their faith in Jesus Christ and have been baptized by immersion only." The recommendation would be discussed and voted on at the next day's morning session.

At that morning session, Hinson spoke to explain the proposed amendment. A substitute motion was offered, but it was defeated. After further debate, another motion offered to table the matter for one year. This motion was ruled out of order by the parliamentarian. The vote was 142 in favor and 74 against.

The amendment lost by two votes since there was not a two-thirds majority.

During the miscellaneous business period, one other motion came to the floor regarding this issue. The proposal called for a 60-day period for the two churches to reconsider their policies. If the churches choose not to comply, they make themselves no longer part of the Union Association. There was considerable discussion. After a second vote, the motion did not carry.

John Grant presided over these sessions. He said he stuck closely to the Bylaws. "Those laws are practical and they are human."

## *CLARENCE VASSAR, 1987-1991*

Rev. Clarence Vassar became Director of Missions in 1987. It took the committee almost one year before presenting Vassar's name. Bill Culbertson, chairman of the search committee, recalled the search had been one of great difficulty.

Vassar had outstanding credentials for the director's position. Before entering the ministry, Vassar worked as an engineer and a designer of aircraft. "My Christian training and background led me to an inner struggle regarding my occupation. I couldn't see designing instruments to obliterate people." He left his job and enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from which he earned a Master of Religious Education degree. He worked in local churches in Texas, Alabama, Virginia and North Carolina. He served as Director of Missions in Yadkin Baptist Association in North Carolina eight years. It was from that position he came to Union Association.

His first moves after assuming his post were getting to know pastors. "I met with 55 pastors to get a sense of direction," he said. At the 1987 annual meeting, Vassar made his first report. He spoke of his vision for the association. He urged the churches to respond to the possibilities of ministry in an expanding Union County.

One significant document came from a Strategy Planning Committee. The report, entitled UNION BAPTISTS: THE YEARS AHEAD, set challenging goals. Vassar said the document provided him guidelines for all the work he sought to do.

This report was adopted by the association at the 1988 annual meeting.

It sets forth goals for the years 1988-1993. John Grant, associate chairman of the Strategy Planning Committee, praised the report. He said he took pride in the study and its challenges. Vassar also endorsed the report. "This study has been my guide as I tried to do the work I was called to do."

The report lists four objectives:

Objective 1 - EVANGELISM - The purpose of this objective includes encouraging churches to reach people for Jesus Christ. One goal encourages setting yearly challenges for the number of people to win to Christ. Goal two seeks to assist churches and the church planter by identifying people to be reached.

Objective 2 - MISSION MINISTRIES - The thrust of this objective focuses on human social needs. It includes a wide range of actions ranging from substance abuse, teen age pregnancy, housing to illiteracy, etc. Churches are encouraged to establish a "Community Mission Program."

Objective 3 - COMMUNICATION - A major part of this objective includes encouraging ministers and their spouses to participate in fellowship groups. The committee report also saw a need to improve the quality and circulation of the associational newsletter.

Objective 4 - CHURCH GROWTH - This objective includes improving leadership opportunities, encouraging Sunday School growth, and stewardship.

Vassar went to work to carry out these objectives. Bobby Griffin, a Monroe attorney who served as moderator one year, paid high tribute to Vassar. "To his credit, Clarence Vassar called us back to the main business."

Vassar led the association to conduct what is called a "New Work Probe." Pastors and lay persons drove into four areas of the county to see where pockets of people live, and where new churches need to be planted. "They actually came up with 16 sites," Vassar said. In his report to the 1988 annual meeting, he said the PROBE study indicated a need to plant new churches (four now, three more tomorrow) and nine ministry points that needed cultivation.

By 1988, the statistical data suggest the continuing growth of the asso-

ciation:

Number of churches: 64

Number of baptisms: 531

Number of members: 20,304

Gifts to local missions and expense: \$6,338,996

Gifts to mission causes: \$899,311

Associational missions: \$79,536

As a result of the study of needs, the association in 1988 enlarged Vassar's staff by adding Rev. Randy Wadford. Wadford's official title is Church Extension Director-Church Planter. He works both for the Home Mission Board, the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, and the Union Baptist Association.

Before coming to work in Union Association, he worked with church extension in Mecklenburg. He holds degrees from Anderson College, Central Wesleyan College, and Southeastern Baptist Seminary. He completed the D. Min. degree from Drew University in 1992.

Union Association provides the major part of his salary. He supervises church planters in this area.

His work varies depending upon needs. For example, when he began his work here, he spent most of his time in the Goose Creek area. He surveyed community needs and helped the young church find available resources. He also served as the founding pastor for Christ Baptist Church.

"At the outset, I was pastor of that group. There was no specific time frame set for how long I would hold that position," Wadford said.

Within six months, the church called a co-pastor, Rev. Kevin Woody. "I think this church is well on its way, and I feel good about it."

Wadford also has other duties to perform. He assists churches in getting summer youth workers. He seeks to find sources of money for churches to do specific projects.

Wadford directed three churches in the association as they went through what is called a PACT study. This study helps a church undergoing some major transition. He makes a study of the church as it presently exists. Then he helps that church set new goals, and discover a new vision.

Vassar worked closely with Wadford to begin new churches in areas of

need. Vassar said the group seeking to start a work must first find land. "Sometimes that is difficult and expensive."

Vassar points to Weddington church as an example. The association bought land for that group. In a short time, membership rose to 135 and the church bought the land back from the association.

Christ Baptist Church, a second new work, began under Vassar's leadership. Now 55 people belong to this church. "They will have their land paid for by the end of 1992," Vassar said.

Other new works include:

- Morgan Mill Road Church with 65 members. The association helped them.
- The Good Shepherd-This is a work with Hispanics in Union County. The group began with help from Jimmy Kiker of Anson County. Tommy Concha is their bivocational pastor. The group meets in the facilities of Oakland Baptist Church. They are still a mission.
- Pathway-Now meets in a storefront near Auto Bell in Monroe. Bobby Helms is pastor. The association helped them get rental assistance. They have now merged with Forest Hills Baptist Church.
- Solid Rock-A church already in existence which voted to join Union Baptist Association. They are under watchcare currently.
- Sun Valley- Now under the leadership of Tom Baker, a church planter. Vassar thinks the potential for growth in this church is outstanding. This mission is hoping to grow into a Church soon.
- Sandy Acres Mission-Vassar takes special pride in talking about this group.

It began in a trailer park. Mt. Moriah's youth conducted a week-long mission Vacation Bible School there. Children from the park urged the church not to desert them. The state convention purchased a modular unit and located it in the park. Presently, 100 persons attend Sandy Acres Mission.

Vassar says this mission point illustrates the way God's work goes for-

ward. "A group of Christians in a local church see a need and respond to it."

Vassar thinks his work was cut out for him when he came to the association. "I sensed a need here and tried to respond to that need."

Vassar's wife, Barbara, worked closely with her husband. She has a strong interest in literacy work, and has helped train 20 people to teach literacy.

Earl James, present moderator, has high words of praise for Vassar. "He got our association off dead center," James said.

There now are 70 churches and missions in Union Association and membership has reached nearly 20 thousand.

Vassar says the giving of these churches has doubled since 1987. "That's a fact I am most grateful for."

The association held a special retirement recognition for Clarence and Barbara Vassar on January 5, 1992 at Wingate College. Vassar says the 4 years and nine months have been the highlight of his ministry. "There have been some headaches and heartaches, but I move to a new stage of life with profound gratitude to God."

## *TO BE CONTINUED*

As one looks back over the work of Union Baptist Association from 1969 until the present, there emerges a strong sense of victory. This body of Christians has dealt with burgeoning county growth, has struggled with issues and has moved forward.

Luke, the author of the Book of Acts tells us he wanted to tell the story of all that Jesus began to do (Acts 1:2) Through Union Baptist Association, the Holy Spirit is still at work. The story goes on. To God be the glory.

Year	Moderator	Director of Missions
1969	Robert T. Byrd	Arch Cree
1970	Robert Taylor	Aaron Tyner
1971	Robert Taylor	Aaron Tyner
1972	Lawrence Funderburk	Aaron Tyner
1973	J. S. Larrimore	_____
1974	J. S. Larrimore	Ellis Marks
1975	W. L. Culbertson	Ellis Marks
1976	W. L. Culbertson	Ellis Marks
1977	John M. Wood	Ellis Marks
1978	John M. Wood	Ellis Marks
1979	B. C. Beal, Jr.	Ellis Marks
1980	B. C. Beal, Jr.	Ellis Marks
1981	Robert Howard	Ellis Marks
1982	Robert Howard	Ellis Marks
1983	George Gouge	Ellis Marks
1984	George Gouge	Ellis Marks
1985	John Grant	Ellis Marks
1986	John Grant	_____
1987	Earl James	Clarence Vassar
1988	Earl James	Clarence Vassar
1989	Robert Taylor	Clarence Vassar
1990	Bobby Griffin	Clarence Vassar
1991	Earl James	Clarence Vassar



